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The Water Front of New York

by

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Illustrated

with

Maps
and
Working Blue Prints

New York. May 1889.

What has made New York the metropolis of the whole Western World putting it hopelessly ahead of all the other busy pushing American ports together? Shown by the 70% of the country's customs collected here.

Why does the tide of immigration flow through here, making this the most cosmopolitan city in the world? Pinned by the strong and well organized societies of all nationalities in the Centennial City

356853

Parade.

To what does the city owe its wonderful growth and immense incalculable wealth, that political power that has often decided a national election; in short its proud position as the commercial, manufacturing, social, and artistic centre of America & half the world?

The answer is as simple as the question is complex. New York owes it all to its unequaled Harbor and Water Front.

The National Government controlls the harbor, with it at present we have nothing to do.

We will confine ourselves to the water front as limited by an immaginary line which starts at the Bronx River, runs round Manhattan Island to the city limits on the Hudson, at an average distance of 1000 feet off shore.

Every thing within this line, including the whole Harlem River is the

property of the city,
everything without is the
property of, and under
the jurisdiction of the
National Government.

Now who is responsible
for the efficiency of
the water front inside
and line? how much
of it is economically
used? and what are the
plans for its improvement
The Department of Docks
has absolute control
of this water front —
it consists of three
Commissioners appointed

by the Mayor who serves
s ix years at a salary
of $3000.

The duties of the Depart-
ment are partly legislative,
partly executive, including
the entire management
of the water front, both
that part which is owned
by the city and that
owned by private parties.
This in its widest sense
making of wharf regulations
ordering and performing
all dredging, and all
repairs to old and
erection of new structures;

and even confining classes of commerce to certain localities.

The plan of the Department is for the city to acquire all property on the water front; to run a marginal street 250 feet wide entirely round the island, bounded on the outside by a bulk head wall of first class masonry.

To build standard piers according to blue prints accompanying this thesis and rent them to shippers.

Now the owners dont give up valuable wharf property to the city as any-one else without a virulent struggle, and as the statutes under which the city can condemn and acquire land, under its right of "eminent domain" are very loose. It is hardly surprising that but one piece of property has been acquired in this way since the formation of the Department in 1871; and this cost something outrageous to carry it up

to the highest court.

It is the Department buys more land every year by amicable agreement, because the property owners fear the Board will get a more stringent law through the legislature, though the owners have succeeded in defeating it every year so far.

So the Board is surely draying up the water front and scored a great victory when the highest court decided that all land in the

prolongation of the struts belonged to the city anyway.

The marginal strip mentioned is to afford ample room for tracking and a network of freight and horse car tracks.

It will be seen from the working blue prints of a standard pier, that freight cars can be run out on the wharf right alongside the steamers.

This strip cannot always be run 250 ft. wide,

notably on the lower East River front, but is never to be narrower than 150 feet.

The East River is so narrow and as a consequence the tide runs so strong that even on the lower part only short piers up to about 300 feet are allowed which grow shorter and shorter as we go up town till at 42 St. they practically stop.

This confines the piers to the use of sailing vessels, coastwise steamers,

lumber and coal yards, ⁊c ⁊c.
So the big trans-atlantic
liners, freight steamers,
Sound and North River
boats, and all railroads with
termini at Jersey City
to the North River.
Now for reasons presently
to be discussed there are
no piers between West 11 St.
and West 22 St. and as
business hesitates to jump
this half mile up town
there results a tremendous
pressure for wharf room
between Battery and West 11 St.
Fortunately, this district
a large part of

belongs to the city, especially between Canal and 11th Streets, and has been improved in accordance with the general plan to its maximum efficiency.

Stall rents are high pier renting for from $30000. up to the following prices, per annum.

Pacific Mail S.S. Co. $45000, for pier nos 34 and 75 feet S. bulk head.

N.Y. Lake Erie & Western R.R. Co. do $95000. for pier nos 20 and 21 and 560 feet S. bulk head,

C. P. Huntington $ 70000. for pier num 37, and $ 42000. for half bulk head north of it.

So it is not astonishing that the Board collected in 1888 $ 1,300,000. wharf rent; and as nearly all this is used in purchase and improvement of new property, the income from the water front has increased ~~has increased~~ by over $ 100,000. each year.

But the Board has secured tenants for the piers it is building

from West 22 St up, and when a few business interests have started above 22 St. the water front will go on developing with normal rapidity uptown.

The Department is perfecting a plan for utilising the water front of Riverside Park without marring its beauty, partly by tunnelling the bluff.

The Harlem River will be easily improved when commerce shall demand it.

But why are there no piers between West 11 and West 22 St?

Because long before there was any Board of Dock Commissioners the owners of this property began filling in from the shore "reclaiming land from the river" as it is called. And this has been carried as far as a thousand feet beyond original high water mark: the legislature allowing it to go on to its present state, although the Harbor Commissioners

as long ago as 1857 warned
it of the present danger;
which is briefly this.
The current of the North
River together with
the ebb tide is deflected
by Carlisle's Hook on the
Jersey shore towards the
New York shore, and
the 40 foot channel
runs right off the ends
of the long piers.
Now this filling in has
been carried on beyond
the longest piers and the
main channel narrowed
to such an extent

that if any piers were built out from the present shore line they would act as training walls to throw the river and tidal currents over to the Jersey shore where they would cut out a new channel. Our channel would fill up with silt &c. and the Jersey flats would come over here and ruin our waterfront and commerce for all time.

The present law provides that the bulkhead wall shall be carried along 13th Avenue as in annexed map and no piers built out at all.

Besides the immense loss of revenue to the city and inconvenience to commerce this arrangement would entail, there is a still graver objection.

The filled in portion consists largely of crib-work, and this is true of various

points owned by private parties along the river.

The flood tide carries sewage into this cribwork where it settles over everything as no current can get at it, decomposes and is a deadly menace to the public health.

So the following "new plan" was devised and embodied in a bill which was defeated in the last legislature; and unless the Board gets authority to carry

out this "new plan" it must go ahead and carry out the old one with all its disadvantages.

This "new plan" is briefly ——

(1) To continue West St. widened to 250 feet upon its line between West 11 St. and Gansevoort St. to the intersection of this line with 13th Avenue.

(2) To remove all buildings, piers, earth, mud, and crib-work, west of this 250 foot St. to a

depth of 25 feet below mean low water mark.

(3) To build the standard bulkhead wall along the west side of this slip.

(4) To build 21 new piers, according to blue prints, each 80 feet wide and from 450 to 530 feet long, with slips 160 feet wide between.

This new plan will be understood by a reference to the annexed maps where the two plans are compared with the present arrangement.

The total amount of wharfage room by this plan is about 25,570. feet, against 7600 feet by the present plan, as before stated.

Besides this gain to commerce, and the removal of nearly 300000 cubic yards of rotting crib-work impregnated with sewage; this would throw a paying investment to the city, shown by a summary of calculation on following page.

Cost of property $ 3,100,000.

Removal of cribwork and
felling and dredging
to required depth 1,030,000.

New piers @ $ 40000 840 000.

$ 4,970,000.

Adding 10% for removal
of buildings contingencies
&c &c as above

Total cost - - - $ 5,460,000.

Supporting the 21 piers
to rest at the minimum
price of $ 30000.
as above - - - $ 630000.

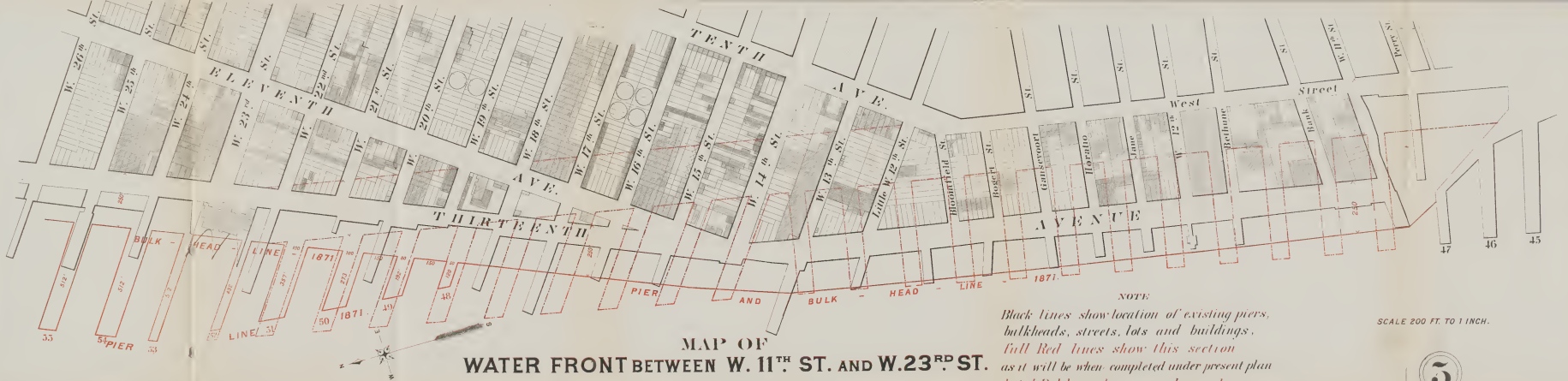
Deducting present taxes
of $ 51,000.
there remains a yearly
income of $ 58,000 or
more than 10% on the
investment.

To return for a moment
to the present plan for
this district we see that
by building a few
wooden piers which seem
small things compared
to the North River, the
most valuable part
of the water front would
be ruined, and an
amount of damage

done the city which money could not express.

But this teaches a broader lesson, that is in how delicate an equilibrium the forces of Nature are poised; and that they are to be disturbed only when patient investigation has been carried to the limits of human science.

Finis.



MAP OF WATER FRONT BETWEEN W. 11TH. ST. AND W. 23RD ST.

NOTE

Black lines show location of existing piers, bulkheads, streets, lots and buildings.
Full Red lines show this section as it will be when completed under present plan
dotted Red lines show proposed new plan.

SCALE 200 FT. TO 1 INCH.

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[illegible] entirely to the city
and